

The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

BULLETIN ONE HUNDRED THIRTY SIX

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SUMMER 1976

TOUCHSTONES by Eugene A. Walker (presidential address, The Thoreau Society Annual Meeting, July 10, 1976)

When I began to consider what I might say about Henry Thoreau on this occasion, I wondered what I could possibly talk about that others had not covered before. Facing this predicament, I sifted through notes and quotes that I had saved from time to time, hunting for a theme that might bear enlarging upon. Finally a line from an article on Thoreau by Horst Oppel in a German encyclopedia of literature published in 1955 caught my attention: "...his final effect has not yet been felt on either side of the Atlantic."

This is a cryptic sentence, I thought. It hints that the ideas of Henry Thoreau will have some final effect, on both side of the Atlantic Ocean, but leaves no intimation of what the effect may be. Who can say what Thoreau's final effect will be?

Finding myself in the quandary, I rephrased the question and asked, what it is about the spirit of Henry Thoreau, whose body has been at rest these many years, that brings us together here today, when there are so many other pleasant things we might be doing - walking along shady paths in a forest, boating, working in our gardens, or merely swinging in a hammock?

There are, of course, plenty of reasons why people are sufficiently attracted to Thoreau to get together and talk about him. Thoreau was a multifarious character, who offers, either in his writings or in his manner of life, food for a great variety of tastes. As we go through life and as we read, we look for what pleases us, and in the immense variety that Thoreau serves forth, almost every seeker is likely to find satisfactions. Are you interested in natural history? His observations range over the cosmos from snowflake to star, and are illuminated with poetic insight. Whether you are botanist, birdwatcher, or viewer of landscape, he can add something to your perceptions. Are you interested in the Concord of his time? There are enough sketches of such people as Hugh Quoil, the Napoleonic veteran, or the Milldam loungers, to make one wish for more.

Passing next to the realm of ideas, somewhere in Thoreau's writings you probably can turn up quotable authority for the style of life that appeals to you. Do you wish to evade commitment, to escape from involvement, perhaps from entanglement with emotion? Read Thoreau the lonely flutist, the rebel against compulsion from his family, from society, from the church and the state. Or, perhaps you feel that life is enhanced by intense involvement and service to others? Then read of the Thoreau who nursed his dying father, who went the rounds of Concord collecting money for impoverished Irish, who drudged away in the graphite business to support his sisters and mother, and now and then dealt in the troublesome matter of smuggling fugitive slaves northward to Canada.

The Thoreau Society, Inc. is an informal gathering of students and followers of Henry David Thoreau. W. Stephen Thomas, Rochester, N.Y., president; Mrs. Charles MacPherson, Acton, Mass., vice-president; and Walter Harding, State Univ., Geneseo, N.Y. 14454, secretary-treasurer. Annual membership \$2.00; life membership, \$50.00. Address communications to the secretary.

However, there is a more complex character here than a man who had many interests, wrote well and said and did fine things. Thus I said to myself, and next, to clear up the matter in my own mind as much as to talk about it, I began to ask myself what are the basic reasons why Henry Thoreau's reputation has grown so greatly.

There is a black, fine-textured stone, I remembered, that jewellers keep on their benches - a touchstone - on which they stroke objects of gold, and judge the purity of the gold by the color of the mark. What touchstones are there by which to judge Thoreau's character and attainments?

The first touchstone, I thought, may be vision, for there can hardly be greatness without vision. Surely Thoreau is memorable in that he possessed a vision and insight greater than has been granted to the rest of us. Like other visionaries such as the poet Blake, Thoreau trusted in his own enlightenment. "Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I were more favored by the gods than they, beyond any deserts that I am conscious of - as if I had a warrant and surety at their hands which my fellows have not, and were especially guided and guarded." "Listen to me," I seem to hear him say, "knowledge has been given me that must not be lost; I have found treasures that I must pass on into your hands." This attitude vexed Hawthorne and others also, but without it Thoreau would not have had the assurance to endure the labors of leaving his visions, in copious writings, as his message to the future.

The second touchstone might be creative intelligence, for without it, vision may become fanaticism, or fade into misty vagueness. Thoreau has a singularly rational vision, considering that he tended to be poetic. This vision of his was that the universe, from atoms to men to societies, is pervaded by order and laws; and his principal aim, whatever sidelines he also explored, was the perception of those laws and harmonies, from the point of view of the poet rather than of the scientist. The observations that he wrote up on the succession of forest trees in the abandoned pastures of Concord gave him position as a pioneer ecologist, but what concerned him far more was the ecology of man, covering such matters as how to conduct life in harmony with nature, how to make a living properly, and the costs of life. Nothing is free, he tells us, least of all time; live in anticipation of those bills that will eventually be rendered, commonly when it is too late to return the goods. Read him yourself for the laws, in the great essay on Life Without Principle. Again, one hears him say, "Take care!" - "we postpone life to some trivial business, and therefore heaven also." "Watch out!", he warns, "The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling," or cautions - We spend more on almost any article of body aliment or ailment than on our mental aliment." And as a paradox from the social rebel and non-attender of church - "Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice."

Goodness in the only investment that never fails."

The third touchstone that I choose is courage, for without this, vision, even aided by intelligence, may turn into the quiet path of contemplation and inaction. Thoreau possessed the vigor and courage to act out his principles, costly though they could be in social affability - "I love Henry but do not like him", said Elizabeth Hoar, and "I would as soon take Henry's arm as take the arm of an elm tree", from Emerson. Did Thoreau petition that a memorial service be held for John Brown, that leader of armed rebellion against the republic? or did he announce that he was holding a meeting? With his recognized gift for writing about nature, he could have remained aloof from politics, to tend to higher things - instead he wrote "Slavery in Massachusetts," one of the most violent papers in American literature. He rejected invitations to speak where his subject was circumscribed, and broke with the editor who ventured to censor the idea that a tall white pine tree might have a soul. Mariners in the North Atlantic who see an iceberg heading up into the teeth of a gale judge rightly that it is a great berg that reaches down into and is moved by the deep currents, and so the sharp-sighted Harriet Martineau judged, when she visited the United States, that the great men were Garrison and Thoreau, who were guided by great and eternal principles, and accordingly moved against the shallow currents in which some of the big men of the day, such as the compromising Webster, drifted to and fro.

As a fourth touchstone, I choose faith, enduring faith. Many men have had noble visions and have written of them beautifully, and have tried to express them in their own lives, but in the end have left messages of despair - you may fill in the names with little trouble. Time withholds the crown from the pessimists and gives it to the great creative optimists - Dante with his vision of Paradise; our own Walt Whitman with his visions for America. "As for doomsday," says Rene Dubos, "the people who despair don't matter, It's not they that provide the answer, anyway."

The image of Thoreau as a stoic, created partly by Emerson, tends to linger on, but Henry was far from being a stoic, as his sister Sophia protested. Rather, we may think of him as "A Master of the Affirmative Way, which pursues perfection through delight in the created World", borrowing the splendid line applied to the noble poet Traherne. With faith, we may say, Thoreau dug for, and found the ineradicable roots of good in the universe.

To me, a spirit of elation runs through the writings of Thoreau, often expressed in his love of the wind, the "searching wind that drives away all contagion." What he celebrates is not the wistful beauty of sunsets, of fading things, of resignation, but the glow of sunrises, "... the everlasting vigour and fertility of the world." "The morning wind forever blows," he cries, "the poem of creation is uninterrupted," - "Renew thyself completely each day", he commands us, "... do it again and again, and forever again." To those of us who ever keep looking forward to some future time when hopefully things may be better, and our lives more calm and beautiful, he gives this unforgettable counsel - "God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages."

We can continue talking about Henry Thoreau indefinitely, can we not, and still there will remain more to be said. We do not turn to him for final answers, but for a way of thinking and living. The

young man who saw that the world was more to be admired than to be made use of, grew up and warned us to observe the laws, and to live within our means, but by all means to live now. If at length, we learn to treat the world as a garden, not as a mine; to exploit others less, and to drive ourselves more gently, so as to preserve that bloom as of fresh fruit; it may be that some historian will attribute part of such a change in our values to Henry Thoreau's teachings, and this would be a very fitting final effect of his life and thought.



7-1-52

THE ANNUAL MEETING

The 1976 annual meeting of the Thoreau Society was held in the First Parish Church in Concord, Mass. on Saturday, July 10th, with President Eugene Walker presiding. The minutes of the 1975 meeting were accepted as printed in the Summer, 1975, bulletin. The following report, as presented by the treasurer, was accepted:

Balance on Hand as of June 4, 1975 \$4,795.21

Receipts

Dues	\$1,737.00	
Sale of back copies	71.70	
Life memberships	300.00	
Royalties	78.09	
Gifts	25.00	
Sale of luncheon tickets	540.00	
Sale of photographs	15.50	
Interest	92.45	
	<u>\$2,859.74</u>	<u>2,859.74</u>
		<u>\$7,654.95</u>

Expenses

Annual Meeting		
(including lunch)	\$1,223.71	
Postage & Handling	738.89	
Printing	1,573.68	
Miscellaneous	106.13	
Mt. Monadnock Fund	500.00	
Photography	25.00	
	<u>\$4,167.41</u>	<u>4,167.41</u>

Balance on Hand as of June 4, 1976 \$3,487.54

Upon a motion presented by Mary Fenn the secretary was instructed to send letters of sympathy to the families of two charter members of the society, Theodore L. Bailey of Cleveland, Ohio, a former president of the society; and Mrs. Elmer Joslin of Concord, Mass., whose deaths occurred recently.

Upon motion of William Howarth, chairman of the nominating committee, the following slate of officers was presented: W. Stephen Thomas, Rochester, N.Y., president; Paul Williams, Elmhurst, Ill., president-elect; Mrs. Charles MacPherson, Acton, Mass., vice-president; and Walter Harding, Geneseo, N.Y., secretary-treasurer; all for terms of one year; and Mrs. Edmund Fenn and Mrs. Thomas McGrath, both of Concord, for three-year terms on the executive committee. There being no additional nominations from the floor, the above slate was declared elected upon motion of Robert Needham.

Upon motion of Albert Bussewitz, it was voted to raise the annual dues of the society from \$2.00 to \$3.00 and the life membership from \$50.00 to \$100.00, effective July 1, 1977, thus giving members a year of grace to extend their memberships at the old rates if they wish. (The raising of the dues was deemed necessary when the treasurer pointed out that for several years now because of the sharp rises in both printing and mailing charges the expenditures of the

society have been larger than the income.)

William Howarth, editor-in-chief of the new Princeton University Press edition of The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau, reported briefly on the status of the edition. Walden, The Maine Woods, Reform Papers, and Early Essays and Miscellanies are in print. Journal I is "in press" at the moment. A Week, Excursions and Journal II will be ready to go to press this fall. And numerous other volumes are on the way.

Upon motion of Dana Greeley, it was voted that the society offer its support and encouragement to the Friends of Walden Pond in any way that it might be possible for their immediate and long-range planning to keep or to make the site of Thoreau's Walden house what from the local and world point of view it ought to be.

Upon motion of Walter Harding, it was voted that the following resolution be sent to the Department of Environmental Management of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts which is in charge of the Walden Pond State Reservation:

"Whereas Henry David Thoreau's Walden is universally considered one of the masterpieces of world literature; and

"whereas in 1872 Amos Bronson Alcott established a cairn of rocks at Walden Pond to mark the site of Thoreau's house and thereby established the custom of visitors to the site adding stones to that cairn as their tribute to Thoreau; and

whereas that custom has been continued for more than a century with stones for that purpose having been brought from all parts of our country and from lands as distant as India and Japan; and

whereas this cairn, unique in the annals of our history and literature, has been removed by the Department of Environmental Management of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts;

be it hereby resolved that said Department of Environmental Management be requested to restore the cairn to its site as soon as possible and take such measures as necessary to protect it and continue the time-honored custom of adding to it."

(Members of the society wishing to personally endorse this resolution may direct their letters to Dr. Bette Woody of the Department of Environmental Management or Governor Michael Dukakis, both at the State House, Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.)

The business meeting was followed by a paper on "The Borrowed Axe" by Walter Teller, speaker of the day, and "Touchstone," the presidential address by Eugene Walker. The business meeting was preceded by a coffee hour and followed by a luncheon. The afternoon program began with the annual Thoreau quiz moderated by Roland Robbins. It was followed by a number of optional features--a trip to Ball's Hill led by Eugene Walker; a visit to Concord Free Public Library led by the society archivist Marcia Moss; a visit to Sleepy Hollow Cemetery led by Robert Needham; a tour of old houses of the downtown area led by Mary Fenn; a visit to the Thoreau-Alcott House courtesy of its owners Dr. and Mrs. Paul Dinsmore; and a visit to the newly restored Concord School of Philosophy courtesy of Orchard House. In the late afternoon the Thoreau Lyceum presented a sherry and iced tea party, a box supper, and an exhibition of photographs of Thoreau's Cape Cod by Merlene Ogden.

The evening session, at the First Parish Vestry, featured a slide-lecture by Edwin Way Teale on "Thoreau and the Cats of Zanzibar." This was followed by a musicale of Thoreau's favorite music presented

by John Ostrowski, tenor; Ethel Farny, flutist; and Cynthia Walker, pianist. The meeting closed with the presentation of the society's gavel to the incoming president, W. Stephen Thomas, by the outgoing president, Eugene Walker.

Those attending the meeting are particularly indebted to Lucille Needham for preparing the coffee hour; Mary Gail Fenn, for arranging wild flowers; and David Dean for providing an audio and taping system.

On Friday evening, the night before the annual meeting, the Thoreau Lyceum presented a lecture by Theodore Haddin of the University of Alabama. And on Sunday morning, the day after the meeting, the First Parish Church presented a special service entitled "Walden: A Unitarian-Universalist Celebration."



7-14-52

These drawings are reproduced from Thoreau's Journal. If you wish to identify them, simply look up the journal entry for the date indicated in the numerals.



7-18-52

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5-23-52

CURRENT THOREAU LITERATURE WH

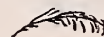
One of the most delightful books we've ever seen for children is the new Lerner edition of the hilarious tale Thoreau tells in his *JOURNAL* of *WHAT BEFELL AT MRS. BROOKS'S*. It has long been a favorite passage of ours and now George Overlie with his illustrations has given it just the right touch. Your children are guaranteed to enjoy it--when they can get it away from you. . . Volume XI of the *JOURNALS AND MISCELLANEOUS NOTEBOOKS* of Emerson is the most important volume yet of that series to Thoreauvians. It covers the years 1848-51 with many, many comments on Thoreau, often comparing and contrasting Thoreau and Ellery Channing. It gives many of the details of Margaret Fuller's drowning and records Emerson's frequent disappointment with the young geniuses around him. And for those of us who have been turned off by Thoreau's harsh description of Samuel Hoar, we dis-

cover here that Emerson too considered Hoar a cold fish indeed. This is a volume no Thoreau scholar can do without. . . Over the past few years Rev. Mr. Roseliep has published here and there many of his haiku-poems on Thoreau. Now they are gathered together in a beautifully printed little volume. Example:

Welcome-mat of snow
with readable small type set
by a meadow mouse.

Dolnikowski's article on "Thoreau and Tolstoy" is by far the most comprehensive account yet of the Russian's interest in Thoreau. . . William Moss's "So Many Promising Youths" demonstrates that Emerson's initial enthusiasm for and later disappointment with Thoreau is typical of a pattern Emerson followed by Whitman, Ellery Channing, Jones Very, Christopher Cranch, and Charles King Newcomb.

We are indebted to the following for information used in this bulletin: W. Bottorff, A. Butler, W. Bonner, R. Dickens, G. Dolnikowski, J. Donovan, R. Epler, R. Ganley, D. Harrison, C. Heinle, G. Hannon, H. Houston, W. Howarth, R. Haynes, J. Johnston, K. Kasegawa, D. Murray, R. Needham, P. Oehser, R. Schaedle, E. Shaw, J. Smith, R. Thompson, J. Vickers, R. Weatherby, and S. Wellman. Please keep the secretary informed of Thoreau items he has missed and new ones as they appear.



1-2-53

PASSAGES FROM JOHN THOREAU, JR.'S JOURNAL by Thomas Blanding

Journals were a kind of fourth estate in Transcendental Concord to which Thoreau, Emerson, Alcott, Hawthorne, and Channing contributed regularly. Day and night, like their puritan forefathers, they tested their art and tried their consciences, spliced sentences and sentiments, to report something new under the sun. It is true, as Thoreau wryly remarked about his own notebooks, they were journals of no very wide circulation; still, except the erratic Channing, the Concord authors' constancy to their pages rarely flagged.

John Thoreau, Jr., too, contributed his copy. We do not know how long or how devotedly he kept a journal--only nine pages survive from 1840 and 1841--but these passages place him squarely with his younger brother in the Transcendentalist Camp.¹

Interests and influences flowed liberally between Henry and John. They taught together in their progressive Concord Academy, boated on the river, learned their "Newness" from Mr. Emerson, botanized and birded in Concord meadows, and even loved the same young girl from Scituate. Whenever the busy nineteenth century bustled disquietingly on Concord Milldam, they struck out together across lots for Walden Woods, where a generous and abiding communion with nature flourished in their imaginations.

In friendship, as in the fields, John led, or so Henry averred in verse, "I always lagged behind, / While thou wert ever first."² Perhaps John led in journalizing too. We may even wonder if the "he" of Henry's first entry, October 22, 1837, whom tradition identifies as Emerson, is in fact the elder brother: "What are you doing now?" he asked. "Do you keep a journal?" So I make my first entry to-day."³ Three years later the brothers had not ceased to wonder what they were doing. John Thoreau's journal, like Henry's for the same period, wrestles with the perennial problems of health, wealth, and vocation.

John's journal also affirms the traditions about him; he was literate, gregarious, witty, and bright. Concord

went so far as to think him the more promising of the Thoreau brothers. Indeed, he might have matched Henry in the end had he not died suddenly of lockjaw on January 11, 1842, at the age of twenty-seven. This tragedy sorely tried Henry's physical and philosophical systems, and he never quite recovered from the loss. It is said that he became ill or had unpleasant dreams every year on the anniversary of John's death.⁴ These fragile fragments from John's journal remained among the brother's papers after his own death twenty years later.

July 22nd 1840,⁵

Pray what is it to be poor? Johnson defines Poverty to be, "necessity" "want of Riches" Shaks' speaks of it as "meanness"; "defect". If necessity; do we not all need? are we not then all poor? Want of Riches how much? You are now possessed of ten thousand dollars, and want a hundred thousand. I have not money, and desire none; then are you poorer than myself. I shall not exchange situations with you for ninety thousand dollars; for still wanting ten, I should be poorer by ten thousand dollars than I now am. Meanness is want of spirit Defect want of completeness The four terms imply want Want then is poverty He only is rich who has no desires. Not the man who possesses is without desire. he has care, anxiety, & desires peace; and his possessions themselves are to him only an outward expression of his burning inward desire. Pray what shall we do: I will go to bed! asleep; I shall be richer than a beggar, or a Rothschild awake.

Tonight I feel doleful, somewhat lachrymose, and desponding "Bluey". not absolutely suicidal, but viewing the world at a discount disposed to part with my lease of life for a very small "bonus" Can say with truth I think this the vilest world I have ever been in. I'm getting to be ferocious; rather hope that no small children will come in my way just now; wouldn't be responsible "bereaved Father," "distressed Mother" have very little weight with me at this instant-- Dont feel very wicked neither, am not in debt, not crossed in love or anything of that sort, but still dont feel quite right I rather fear the Kitchen Cabinet have been concocting some indigestible compound today as a specimen of extra skill Wonder if cooks are ever-seized with mania through professional enthusiasm in the art? Recollect partaking once of some preserves prepared in a vessel not previously washed and unfortunately in company with a piece of hard soap I call that Hydrophobous Cooking. Partook of something today they called pudding! took their word for it dont feel quite satisfied! Saw the bag out upon the grass drying this afternoon thought then it didn't look exactly like a common pudding bag Hope there has been no mistake made! remember reading of a man who ground himself up in his Sausage machine; dont exactly think a cook would stir herself into a Huckleberry pudding, but cant say; wouldn't be uncharitable, but certainly things in my chemical laboratory dont assimilate kindly; rather more Chyme than than Chyle I fear, or something of that sort: hence my gloomy feelings-- I'll wait for a little more proof, and then commend me to Epicurus if I dont hang them with their own pudding bag string.

[July] 24th [1840]

Oh what a nervous race of beings this world seems peopled with! I hear a woman laughing down stairs who is half dead with the toothache. And yet there

is a class of individuals who would think every person that might laugh upon the same day on which he should have a fit of the cholic, an imposter.

July 31st. [1840] How happily constituted is the man who can step aside from the busy throng of men as they jostle onward, and survey the procession from his high vantage ground as in the third person; he in the objective No longer the rabble shall have dominion over him This altitude enables him to detect their limit instantly he perceives how little of the narrow path of wisdom falls to his share who travels in "platoon". Allow that the feet of the leader are therein So are not the feet of those who travel upon the flanks Those unfortunate men must be blinded to a sense of their false position and cunningly devised was the scheme which bestows upon them preferment and honor; ever upon the wing we behold the Corporals and Marshalls &c and the poor wretches March on in in dignity with no yearning for the true path. Away with honors, office, bestowments, methinks I'll have a small army of one So Forward!

[July-August 1840?] ⁶

A Rural Scene
afternoon in May.

A quiet pool
The clear blue heavens
Fleecy Clouds
Mellow sunshine
The dark pines
The white birches
The Scarlet Maple
Grey willows
Green Meadows
The yellow Dandelion
The woolen mullen
Mossy stones
Spreading Juniper
Dark clouds Sombre shadows
The ruffled water
Nodding treetops
A whirl of leaves
peeping Frogs
Croaking Toads
Gleams of Sunshine
Chirping sparrows
Cawing crows
Warbling Bluebirds
Distant bell.

* * *

Tuesday May 11th [1841] ⁷

How pitiable the condition of that portion of my fellow men who have no appreciation of the beauties of Nature. Who live in the constant pursuit of necessities; ignobly surrendering up their being to a care of the animal nature; leading mean and unworthy lives, without taste or elegant accomplishments to redeem so slavish an existence. So great are are my pleasures in Nature's Court that I would the whole human family might know by delightful experience the sweetness of such joys. Nature ever keeps open doors; aye courts our attention with her graceful forms and seducing melodies; exhibited in striking contrast to the sights and sounds of noisy, filthy, Money Seeking towns, & cities And shall we refuse to accept her invitations to indulge in the gratification of those tastes strictly in accordance with faculties which our Maker has implanted within our breasts? Let us not deny ourselves the exercise of our birthright.

The last subject was entered upon amid a din of words; an unfolding of a bundle of gossip enough to drive a man to Nova Zembla for quiet. I was just thinking

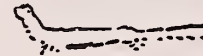
whether any being living could have the hardihood to enter upon such details in one of Nature's noble groves. If such an individual could be found I should hesitate to compare him to any other surrounding object than a rotten fungus. What a divine gift are words! and how uncommon cheap too!! plenty for one's own use and an all sufficiency for friends. They are getting to be an intolerable curse: they crawl over one like the Cockroaches & centipedes of a tropical region. These Scandal Mongers proceed too with evident contempt of one's delicate sense of hearing not recognizing that as words are multiplied ears grow dull they pour out a torrent of ejaculations which to the unsophisticated are absolutely the scarifying of their sense of decency & charity as well as auditory nerve. Clack! Clack! here we have it again! I believe it is the nature of sound to ascend; most immediate relief would seem to be to esconce myself at the bottom of some deep well! So here goes!

Saturday [May] 15th [1841]

"Through the wood" "Through the wood" all ye dipsical hypochondriacal Sons of the medicine Chest! pensioners upon the favor of the apothecaries and ye may throw physic to the dogs, aye walk out ye consumers of others good nature. let the fresh air of heaven visit your weebegone visages, and straighten the contractions of your disconsolate phizzes, Dont for heaven's Sake carry around longer such a countenance as you have imposed upon the world for the last few years. Do for Conscience Sake consider our feelings. All our senses are offended at your existence. Our Eyes? only consider what an appeal your sallow, peaked, lachrymose countenance makes to our optics! And our ears! Heaven save the mark! All my perceptions reject you! Putrify morally and physically if you please in some other region

NOTES: ¹The five surviving leaves of John Thoreau's journal are now in the Houghton Library (bms Am 278. 5), and are here published with the permission of Harvard College Library. They are in a folder labeled "Sophia Thoreau, Fragments of Journal, mostly 1840." A comparison of Sophia, Helen, and John Thoreau's handwritings, however, convincingly assigns these manuscripts to the last named. ²Henry D. Thoreau, Collected Poems of Henry Thoreau, ed. Carl Bode, enlarged edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 316. ³Henry D. Thoreau, The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962), Vol. I, p. 19. ⁴On the first anniversary of John's funeral Henry wrote the following in his journal: "What am I at present? A diseased bundle of nerves standing between time and eternity like a withered leaf that still hangs shivering on its stem." (Thomas Blanding, The Text of Thoreau's Fragmentary Journals of the 1840's, unpublished B. A. Honors Thesis, Marlboro College, 1970, p. 14.) ⁵John wrote this entry three days after his return from Scituate where he proposed to Ellen Sewall. Ellen at first accepted, but almost immediately broke the engagement when she realized she cared for Henry more. Though John attributes his "lachrymose, and desponding 'Bluey'" mood to an indigestible pudding, his matter-of-fact remark that he is "not crossed in love or anything of that sort" sounds like whistling in the dark. ⁶John headed this string of cliches "afternoon in May," but it is written on the verso of the same leaf as the entry for July 31, 1840. ⁷This and the following entry are assigned to 1841 by collation of calendar dates and days of the week. During John Thoreau's

lifetime May 11 and 15 fell on Tuesday and Saturday respectively in 1819 (age four), 1824 (age nine), 1830 (age fifteen), and 1841 (age twenty-six).



12-2-52

THOREAU AND ETHER by William K. Bottorff and David G. Hoch

The note "Thoreau on Drugs," by Michael C. Johnson (TSB, 134 [Winter 1975], 4), seriously misleads the reader as to Thoreau's opinion on ether. "Drugs" is itself a misstatement of Thoreau's concern, which was limited to ether; the term "on" falsely implies a habitual use, where Thoreau had ether but once. That Thoreau "would very probably recommend ... occasional use" of "awareness-altering drugs" today, as Mr. Johnson asserts, is a totally unjustified conclusion. Thoreau's own words announce a repudiation of any such notion.

Mr. Johnson quotes a paragraph from Thoreau's Journal for May 12, 1851 ("By taking the ether. . . . you go beyond the furthest star"), upon which he bases his conclusion. Even if the passage could reasonably be construed that way, when taken alone, two additional remarks by Thoreau would correct the error.

The first of these also occurs in the May 12, 1851 Journal entry. It is, in fact, the next paragraph after the one Mr. Johnson quotes, and we wonder that anyone not attempting a distortion could have missed it: "It is not necessary for them to take ether, who in their sane and waking hours are ever translated by a thought; nor for them to see with their hindheads, who sometimes see from their foreheads; nor listen to the spiritual knockings, who attend to the intimations of reason and conscience."

"Translated" here means something close to "removed to heaven without dying" (Webster, 1828). "Thought" takes on the meaning "Inward reasoning; the workings of conscience" (*ibid.*). Ether offers no transcendental experience. The hinder portion is, of course, "contrary to that of the head or fore part" (*ibid.*), the direction of non-sight as opposed to sight or insight. The false rappings of a spiritualist at a séance are, finally, contrasted to the thought process alluded to earlier. Getting high on ether--aside from its rare, unavoidable medical uses--is for the fool, the unawake, the blind, the superstitious.

Then, in Walden, in the opening paragraph of "The Village," Thoreau rejects the use of ether one more time. He speaks of "inhaling ether" as "only producing numbness and insensibility to pain." This cannot be construed, any more than the other passages can, as being an endorsement of the practice.

To repeat, ether offers no transcendental experience, only distortion and illusion. No other "drugs" are mentioned by Thoreau in these contexts, and no assertion concerning his opinion on any can be based on these contexts. As to ether, not even its use is recommended unless it be for the avoidance of pain while having one's teeth removed.



8-24-52

CONCORD IN WINTER. HAWTHORNE'S HOUSE AND GRAVE -- AN ANCIENT CHRISTIAN, A correspondent of the Cincinnati Commercial who passed an afternoon in Concord in December, has described well some of the localities and notabilities there. He thus gossips of

THE HOMES OF ALCOTT AND HAWTHORNE

[This article from the SPRINGFIELD REPUBLICAN of January 20, 1871, was recently called to our attention by Thomas Blanding.]

I walked away with a light heart, and, following the sidewalk three or four hundred yards beyond Mr. Emerson's home, passed the charming old house of Mr. Alcott. It is a quaint place, having huge elms in its front grounds, with rustic seats, fashioned by Mr. Alcott himself, doubtless, under these; while between the house and the road is a rustic fence of ingenious construction that harmonizes well with the old house and its trees and shrubbery. Immediately behind the house is a hill which extends throughout the town of Concord and overlooks the road and wide, low, level lands to the north, west and south. Beyond the house of Mr. Alcott (this gentleman who talks much and writes little, and by the way, whose most popular production in prose or verse is his daughter Louisa, and, being far-off in a Western conversation, his dwelling was closed and empty during the temporary absence of his family), I did not walk more than a hundred yards, I think, before I reached the last dwelling-place of Hawthorne. This house also formerly belonged to Mr. Alcott, and was bought from him by Hawthorne just previous to his departure for Europe as consul at Liverpool. It is quite old, dating back a hundred years at least, I fancy, and stands like the present dwelling of Alcott, immediately under the hill, with several fine old elms and a long row of Scotch larches in front, and merely a light hedge, with some vague remains of a former fence, between the front yard and the road. Back of the house I saw some fine old apple trees, and some terraces made by Sir Alcott at the foot of the hill, the side and top of which is overgrown with small oak trees, white birches and pine trees. Across the road in front are the low, level meadows, with several clumps of willows, reaching across half a mile to wooded hills, beyond which, by the way, is Thoreau's Walden pond (a glimpse of which I had from the car window just before reaching Concord.) The Hawthorne place was sold some months ago to Sir George Gray, who at present occupies it, and kindly permitted us to look through the rooms especially sacred to the great author departed. Sir Gray showed me into a little, low front room, at the left of the entrance, used by Hawthorne as his library. This is the older portion of the house, but after Hawthorne became owner, he made some additions, especially building a sort of tower one story higher than the rest of the house, in which he made his study. This is entered by a narrow stairway from the second floor of the old building, and it is said that the shy author at first contemplated the making of a trap-door through which to ascend by a ladder, which he could draw up after him, and so prevent intrusion; but he contented himself with the narrow stairway, and, on occasion, could sufficiently seclude himself by the aid of lock and key at the top. I was much interested in visiting this eyrie of a solitary genius, I confess, and the vanished person is not all gone; here and there is a visible and tangible sign which, I doubt not, for many and many a year will make curious pilgrims realize the absent presence. This study is a small room, perhaps twelve feet square, with four windows, overlooking wide and pleasant pastoral landscapes. The wood-work is of pine, red-stained,--the covered stair-case, of this material, presenting the appearance of a large, round-topped, wooden wardrobe or cupboard, while in either corner before one on reaching the top of the stairs is a cupboard or case for books, of the same stained pine. On the top window-casing, between these book-cases, is painted the word "Olympus" in Greek letters, while across the top of the book-case, to the left, is the motto--Dante's inscription over the entrance to hell, slightly

changed--"Abandon care, all ye who enter here;" and across that to the right the window is the line from Tennyson's "Lotus Eaters"--"There is no joy but calm." There are three other windows--two on the southern side, I believe, with an open fire-place between, and over one of these is the word "Harvard." Another inscription that I remember was "J. Hawthorne," the name, I presume, of one of Hawthorne's children. This study is just as its first owner and occupant left it, and but that the book cases are empty, and the high, narrow writing board or desk (also of red-stained pine) was bare of paper and ink, one might dream that he for whose use they were fashioned, had gone out for a walk, perhaps, and would reappear soon at the stair door.

THE GRAVES OF HAWTHORNE AND THOREAU

But on descending and leaving the house I thought of Hawthorne's last going away from it, and, following the path of his funeral train, I walked back into Concord, whence, after dining at the old Middlesex house, I betook myself to the Sleepy Hollow cemetery, a few hundred yards eastward from the town, where I was told Hawthorne and Thoreau were buried. The Sleepy Hollow cemetery is a recent extension of an older one, through which I passed to reach it; you will find the locality mentioned in Hawthorne's Notes, under the name of "Sleepy Hollow," as one of his favorite walks; it is associated, too, with recollections of Margaret Fuller and others. On my way across, between the old burying ground and the new, I stopped to make some inquiries of a man who was employed in grading the paths. He instructed me where to find the graves of Hawthorne and Thoreau, and I asked him:-

'Did you know Mr. Thoreau?'

'Yes, I worked with him. I helped him plant the trees down at the pond. He was an odd man.'

'You knew Mr. Hawthorne, perhaps, too, then?'

'To be sure I did. I couldn't live here as long as I did without knowing him.'

'I suppose many people come here to visit the grave of Hawthorne.'

'Oh yes, a great many; they come from England here.'

Crossing by a path indicated into the Sleepy Hollow portion or the cemetery, I found myself at the opening of a sort of amphitheater, fringed on the eastern side with a grove of small pines, a pond in the low central part, and the embracing slopes and high grounds covered chiefly with oaks, white birches and pine trees. Following a winding and ascending path to the left, I soon reached a high ridge dark with tall pines, and to the northward overlooking wide pastures--levels and stone fenced fields with the Concord river winding in the distance. Here I saw before me a little oblong space, just at the brow of the hill, marked in with a slight evergreen hedge, and within it a single grave overgrown with myrtle, and having a simple headstone and footstone of white marble set in low granite bases, but neither hardly more than twelve inches in height, across which, in black letters, appeared, without other words or any date, the name "Hawthorne." This was all.

A few steps over the slope toward the bowl-like center of Sleepy Hollow, is the inclosure of the Thoreau family, and there, not over twenty feet from Hawthorne's grave, I read on a slab of brown stone, about three feet high: "Henry D. Thoreau. Born July 12, 1817. Died May 6, 1862." So these two men, friends and fellow-townsmen, but both having something of kindred strangeness and shyness of genius, sleep near together, and have a close and lasting neighborhood upon that "hill-top hearsed with pines." Thoreau's father, with a brother and sister also, is buried near him. Besides the graves of Hawthorne and

Thoreau I saw several others that struck veins of historical, literary and political associations in me, with such names as Ripley, Emerson and Hoar, for instance. The cemetery will in time be a very beautiful one, if the artificial is allowed to remain second to the natural beauty of the place.

EBBY HUBBARD

I was persuaded to visit a venerable house belonging to an old man named Ebenezer Hubbard, and said to have been the scene of the early consultations regarding the formation of the constitution of the United States. The house is somewhat over a century and a half old, and its proprietor is nearly ninety. Both dwelling and dweller are full of the past, and the one seemed to be becoming to the other. I took a sad sort of amusement in hearing the little, old stooping man speak of far-off events and people long vanished, as if they were interests and persons of the present. He talked of 'the traitor Hull,' whom he remembered, as if Hull were more recent than Jeff Davis, and his treason was yet to be made personally 'odious.' He showed me a china coffee-pot out of which in his little boyhood he had poured coffee for Gen. Hull and John Hancock, and his indignation was quick in fame when he spoke of the monument at the battlefield, which, he seems to think honors the still present aggressive British by standing on the ground where they fought, instead of being on the opposite bank of the Concord, where the American militia stood. His chief public aim is to have a new monument built, and he showed and gave me a plan of the ground which he told me had been appropriated on the western shore of the river for that purpose. He said, among other things, "The first lead pencil made in this country was made in this house," and gave me some specimens which he told me he had made before the war of 1812. "I gave them out to the scholars," he added, "and they use them now." Of course one who remembered all his native townsmen as boys of yesterday has not had the opportunity of seeing them with the reverence of distance, but he talked of Mr. Emerson with admiration as a good mild man, but he seemed to think little of Thoreau, laying stress on the fact that he had seen him carrying home trees on Sunday, which he had taken up in the woods, to plant at Walden Pond. 'He wasn't worth anything,' was the old man's final verdict.

But, perhaps the most desirable historical fact old Mr. Hubbard gave me was regarding the first boarding-house in Washington, which ought to interest some of our congressional readers. 'I had an aunt,' he told me, 'who went to Washington and opened the first boarding-house. That was before Congress was moved there from Philadelphia. Her name was Sarah Hubbard. Her husband's name was Bond--Bijah Bond. He was a smart man. He went first to Philadelphia, and from there to Washington; then he wrote back for his wife to come and carry on the house. She wanted me to go with her, but something prevented.'

I took leave of this old man with a vague sad feeling--and his blessing. He had previously told me I ought to stay longer, as I had but a few minutes to hear him talk.

'I may come next year,' I said.

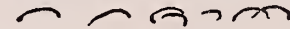
'Well, I may not live; so many die.'

And then he told me who, among his acquaintances had been taken away somewhat suddenly; yet he would soon be ninety.

"I put my dependence in God," he added: "I think there is a supreme God; a good many don't now-a-days," he observed, as if he were surrounded by such people.

A GLIMPSE OF EMERSON

After I had reached the depot (it was dark and snow was falling), my visit to Concord seemed fitly crowned with a little gleam of Emerson. The train from Boston passed as I had just stepped upon the outside platform, and, beside a family carriage in waiting, I remarked, in the vague lamplight which glimmered from the reception room window, the slender form and the outlines of the shrewd, sweet face I had first seen on that winter night of fifteen years ago, but, as I thought, mellowed and softened with time; and a happy chance gave me the opportunity of a few moments' conversation with the poet. A young girl, evidently a stranger just arrived, came up and asked me for information regarding some conveyance, which, being a stranger myself I could not give, when Mr. Emerson, overhearing her question and my answer, drew near and very kindly instructed her. His voice seemed the fit accompaniment of his face in the half darkness; the tenderness and sweetness of his face, one might say, became intelligent in his voice.



6-24-52

NOTES AND QUERIES

The Thoreau Society Archives has recently received from Mrs. Leslie Anderson some more of her Thoreau scrapbooks; from Madevappa Mazapa Yeligar, a copy of WALDEN translated into Kannada (an Indian language); and from Jean Alonso of Newburyport, Mass., a copy of her M.A. thesis on THE GROUND OF WALDEN: THOREAU'S CHANGING THOUGHT AND THE SUCCESSIVE VERSIONS OF WALDEN.

We are grieved to report the decease of T.L. Bailey of Cleveland, Ohio, charter member of the society, president of the society for one year, and an ardent collector of Thoreauviana; of Mrs. Elmer Joslin of Concord, a charter member and probably the only member to have attended every meeting of the society up to 1975; Benton MacKaye of Shirley, Mass., "father" of the Appalachian Trail and regular attendant at the annual meetings; and Mrs. Roland Reim of New Ulm, Minn., a life member of the society. (Donations have been made to the society in memory of Mrs. Reim by Mrs. John Elvin, Mrs. C.I. Spangler, and Mr. Jim Gordon.).

Leda Watson has created an unusual Thoreau collage, framed photographs of which are available from the Thoreau Lyceum for \$25.

Milton Meltzer (263 West End Ave., NYC) asks where Thoreau said, "You cannot say more than you see."

As part of their bicentennial program, Stapleton, Staten Island, has erected a sign on Bay Street, their main street, commemorating the fact that Thoreau once lived for six months on their island.

Samuel Evins Brown (18 Union Street, Toms River, N.J., 08753) publishes a poetry journal named A DIFFERENT DRUMMER and invites unpublished poets to submit their work. Which reminds us Buddy Rich's latest jazz album is entitled A DIFFERENT DRUMMER and that an ad for Greenwood Pickled Beets in the April 7, 1976 WORCESTER TELEGRAM was headed "March to a Different Beet."

A cartoon, "The Girls" by Franklin Folger, syndicated in newspapers such as the ALBANY TIMES UNION for July 6, 1976, shows a matronly lady reading a poster saying "Henry David Thoreau's Birthday July 12th. Celebrate by Reading His Writings" in a public library and lamenting, "Oh dear, I just got the Bicentennial out of the way and now I've got Henry Thoreau on my hands."

A current drive to restore Mechanics Hall in Worcester, Mass., notes that Thoreau once lectured there.

Tri-City Homes in Marquette, Mich. now offer a pre-built 24 x 44 home, named "The Walden" for \$15,000 delivered and set up.